

Extension Education

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Incorporating Gratitude

By Tasha Killian

We all know that saying “thank you to another person” makes them feel good, but did you know that it can actually help you to feel good as well? That’s right, according to research done in a 2012 study in *Personality and Individual Differences*, people who were rated as being more grateful actually reported better health than those who were less grateful. Psychology Today reports that other studies have been done showing that regular expression of gratitude decreases toxic emotions, helps with restful sleep, and can even improve self-esteem. November seems to be the month of celebrating Thanksgiving by listing out our blessings, but with so many benefits to expressing gratitude, shouldn’t we incorporate it in all aspects of our lives? Here are some tips on how to make gratitude a year-round habit instead of just a monthly one.

1. Start a gratitude journal. One way to express your gratitude is to write it down! This can be in an actual journal, or on your phone. One app that helps you cultivate gratitude is called Five Minute Journal. This app reminds you each day to think of something you are grateful for and helps you record your favorite moments of life. Gratitude journals can be written in each day, or once a week. They can be on specific topics or an inclusive list. The best part of gratitude journals is that you can make it your own.
2. Use a gratitude jar. These are jars that collect the things you are grateful for. Each day you write one thing you are grateful for on a slip of paper and then put it into a jar. At the end of the year you have a whole jar full of blessings. This also gives you the opportunity to reflect on each day, finding one thing to appreciate.
3. Send gratitude notes or text messages. We all have people who we can thank in our lives. Maybe it is a boss, a friend, your son, your mother-in-law, or all of the above, people and relationships are important to us. Share the joy and gratitude you have for that person by thanking them in a written note, a card, a text, or even a phone call. Expressing gratitude for one another goes a long way. Try finding a new person to be grateful for each day and thank them for their help in your life. Or focus on one person and find a new quality each day you can thank them for. You will be surprised the impact this can have on your relationships.
4. Set a time each week to sit and think about the things you are grateful for. Similar to meditating, thinking of the things we are thankful for can help us clear our minds and calm down. In fact, according to a 2012 study at the University of Kentucky, taking time to think through the things we are grateful for can actually decrease the level of aggression we have and increase our level of empathy. By setting aside time to ponder through thankfulness, we are actually building more positive emotions.

5. Say thank you more often. This one seems really simple, but a lot of time we don't realize how easy it is to say thank you. Remember to thank the cashier who gives you change, the bus boy who cleaned your table, even the person who let you merge into the lane in front of them. Although these people may not always be able to hear the words we say, building a habit of thanking people naturally leads to having a more grateful perspective on life.

Living in thanksgiving daily is actually one of the best things we can do for our health. From overcoming negative emotions to guiding the way that we interact and build our relationships to helping us remember the good amongst all the bad, expressing gratitude each day can and will increase the amount of joy you feel as well as your level of health, so go ahead, thank someone today.